

INDC - University of Haifa

School of Political Science

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Final Assignment

To use the different approaches learned during the course to examine globalization, the discussion about it or both through critical analysis of two texts: the TV Series and two critical reviews about it.

BBC TV Series, Years and years

Review by The Guardian

Review by The New York Times

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INDC - Class 47 - Team 1

1. Introduction.

Before an analysis of the series and its reviews is commenced it is important to clarify the difference between “term”, “concept”, and “phenomenon” when we discuss about globalization.

“Term” is essentially a word with an associated definition. A unique definition for globalization has not been agreed among scholars and academics, several different ones can be found usually characterized by the main study field of the authors (social sciences, economics, political science, etc.). One example of a definition for globalization that is generic enough for the purpose of this paper, is:

“Globalization is a process that encompasses the causes, course, and consequences of transnational and transcultural integration of human and non-human activities.”¹

At the opposite end of the “term”, we find the “phenomenon”. The phenomenon is the actual, real event with all its consequences effectively happening, even now.

If an author wants to study, or maybe even simply describe a phenomenon, the only practical way is to make an abstraction of it in some way, in order to conceptualize it (illustrate the “concept”) and show what he finds are its main characteristics, similarly to what a physicist does when he conceptualizes a physical phenomenon (i.e. gravity) through a model and its associated formulas.

This is precisely what the authors of *Years and Years* do, they use the audio-visual modeling capabilities of a TV Series to simulate reality and show the spectator their “concept” of modern society and globalization.

¹ <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.472.4772&rep=rep1&type=pdf> - downloaded on 1 Nov 2019

It would be understandably impossible to portray all the people of the world or even only a part of it, so the characters are used to symbolize and represent specific categories of social demographics groups.

2. The TV series

“Years and Years” is a TV series that tells the story of the lives of a single family in the UK, across 15 years, starting in 2019. During this period of time the world is shaken by harsh political, economic, and technological changes. The most actual and current issues, environment, war, social differences, immigration, refugees, nationalism, are presented through the lens of the life of the characters, all struggling to make sense of their lives while the world seem to be collapsing around them.

The main reason the TV series was chosen as the subject of this essay is that it appears to be an excellent tool to conceptualize globalization in our modern times.

The audio-visual metalanguage of cinematography (including with this term also the modern, highly sophisticated productions of current on-demand TV) is a very powerful one, capable of various level of conceptualization while at the same time able to capture the spectator’s attention, and its most deep feelings, with a complex system of multi-faceted state of the art narrative tools.

3. Concepts in the series

The authors chose to illustrate the concept of the phenomenon of globalization, by definition an event that involves the whole world, through a local (we may say narrow) perspective. Every single character represents a fragment of the modern

society (at least the western middle class) but, in the end, remains a single character, a single individual that, through its hopes and fears shows us what effects globalization brings on every single one of us. The storytelling makes use of small details to explain the general. Even if staged in the future, the Series is very much about the present, our present: the future it describes is way too close to us to be indefinite or to be dismissed as “fiction”.

Clearly the Series has no intent to be an academic study, therefore the choice is to show globalization and modern society in an indirect and implicit way. We “experience” globalization through the characters’ decisions, and individual stories.

The choice to illustrate the global perspective from the local one seems to imply that for the authors, while globalization is too big a phenomenon for a single person to make a difference, it is exactly this kind of approach that makes globalization what it is. Globalization looks like a phenomenon that the single individual cannot control, but the cause of this perceived “lack of control” lies precisely in our individual choices, driven by our own disbelief, that makes us disregard global effects concentrating only on the local reality, the one that we think we can actually control.

The approach chosen by the authors somehow criticizes the Public Choice model applied to our contemporary society: in the show, every single person makes choices that are the best rational ones for him/herself, either if only perceived to be good (wider Public Choice interpretation) or are actually good (narrow Public Choice interpretation), but in the end the single individual cannot overcome bad consequences for him/herself because choosing the best for oneself is not enough, in our modern, complex, globalized society.

If one's only goal is to achieve tranquillity and happiness in its own backyard, or within the space of the immediate acquaintances (family, friends) then choosing the closest, and easiest path to perceived happiness will do no good. Eventually, the "globalized" world will catch up with us. An atomic bomb explodes on the other side of the world, but even if the radiation fallout will not hit us, other dire consequences will, and almost instantaneously reach our backyard. A humanitarian refugee crisis strikes in a distant country, but the effects become real and tangible, directly in our homes. The effects are not just the more obvious economic ones; we can save all the money we want, and plan the best future for ourselves, but eventually our savings are nothing more than bits and electrons that move around the globe at the speed of light, and they can disappear in an instant because of global economic dynamics that we cannot even begin to comprehend. But the authors go further and show that even our most intimate thoughts (who we love and marry for example) can be affected. At some point we realize that the world is bigger than our backyard and that our narrow, limited, pursue of happiness becomes pathetic, and possibly even counterproductive.

Looks like in the Series a Pluralistic Approach is assumed. Power in our society is fragmented in a multitude of different interests, dispersed in a variety of economic and ideological groups, which cooperate or compete for the most disparate goals and objectives. While pluralism assumes that diversity is ultimately beneficial, the series shows that reality becomes extremely complex and that there are no simple solutions for complex problems. Pluralism weaknesses are finally exposed, the level of

complexity brought by globalization is unstable and cannot be controlled or managed at the individual level.

4. The Guardian and NYT reviews

Both reviews seem to share the point of view of the authors of the TV Series, particularly that decisions made by individuals do not matter on the grander “scheme of things” that globalization brings with itself.

The Guardian² writes that “...*fear and uncertainty hover all the characters and you can sense their inner gimbals ceaselessly recalibrating , like ours, in search of a stability that never comes*” agreeing with the authors that the pluralist, complex, word (Pluralist Approach) cannot be managed by the single individual making decisions based on their narrow horizon of events (Public Choice).

On the same line, the NYT³ notes: “*The Lyonses are the sort of people who were once insulated from global catastrophes. Now the insulation is peeling off a layer at the time. When things fall apart in Asia, in America, at the North Pole, it becomes your problem eventually, wherever you are*”. Here as well, the Pluralistic view of the globalized world, coupled with the Public Choice critical view appear to be shared and even reinforced. More from the NYT: “*Climate change, financial collapse, political chaos - all these are slowly accumulating worries on the periphery of the characters’ consciousness, until suddenly they’re everywhere and inescapable*”.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/may/14/years-and-years-review-a-glorious-near-future-drama-from-russell-t-davies> by Lucy Mangan, published 14 May 2019 at 22.00 BST

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/23/arts/television/years-and-years-review-hbo.html> by James Poniewazik, published 23 June 2019

Again, individual selfish choices will not be able to change issues that are global and can only be dealt with globally.

5. A different Series

The TV Series is a fictional product and the authors deliberately chose which kind of concepts to portray and how. Let's imagine now that, through the same mean, a TV series, the authors decided to present a different concept of globalization.

They might have chosen to show our society through a marxist approach, where everything is dictated ultimately by economic considerations and where only a revolution would be able to actually change things. In this case the main focus might have been placed not on the decisions of the single characters as individuals but on the processes followed by the political leaderships around the world, revealing that beneath every policy, maybe even hidden under a veil of pretentious moral considerations, the only real goal is always the pursuit of an economic advantage.

On another note, the authors might have depicted a society in which people's destiny (the characters's lives) were in fact determined by an "elite" of a few people in power and whose decisions are capable to affect millions. Concentrating more in showing the mechanisms and dynamics through which the elite exercise its powers (politics, economy, legal, etc.) while leaving the effects on the lives of the characters more in the background of the storyline demonstrating in this way even more how their individual decisions would be essentially irrelevant with respect of the ones made by the elite.